DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 262 016 SP 026 615

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TITLE Necessary Competencies for Corporate Wellness Professionals.
PUB DATE 17 Apr 85
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the National Convention of the American Alliance of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (Atlanta, GA, April 17-21, 1985).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Industrial Personnel; Physical Fitness; Program Content; *Program Improvement; *Well Being; Work Environment
IDENTIFIERS *Wellness Professionals

ABSTRACT

A research study attempted to identify necessary components of a strong corporate wellness training program and to establish a sound research base from which valid curricular decisions could be made concerning program design. Responses from a 52-item questionnaire were received from 248 corporate wellness professionals. Results indicated that the respondents felt the five most important areas of knowledge for their work were: (1) principles of exercise and conditioning; (2) exercise prescription and individual program planning; (3) CPR certification; (4) program planning and administration; and (5) exercise physiology. It is recommended that strong professional preparation programs for wellness professions include competencies and experiences in the following areas: communication, management, counseling, report writing, marketing, psychology, injury care and prevention, exercises for special populations, and elementary word processing. Trained corporate wellness professionals should also be encouraged to participate in professional organizations and enroll in a masters degree program. The survey instrument is appended. (JD)

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Necessary Competencies for Corporate Wellness Professionals

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Paper Presented April 17, 1985

American Alliance of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance

National Convention

Atlanta, Georgia

SP026615

Abstract

A 52 item questionnaire was sent to 393 corporate wellness professionals in an attempt to determine specific guidelines for developing strong professional preparation programs. 248 questionnaires (63.1%) were returned and analyzed. Analysis of the returned questionnaires indicated that greater than two-thirds (67.3%) of the corporate professionals who returned the questionnaires were employed by companies with greater than 500 employees. Nineteen of the 52 questionnaire items received average ratings of less than 1.5 while twenty-five items received average ratings between 1.5 and 1.99. Only eight items received average ratings greater than 1.99. Average item ratings ranged from a low of 1.156 (perceived as most important) to a high of 2.533 (least important). Representative of those items that received average ratings below 2.0 were specific skills (administrative, business, interpersonal and practical), academic classes and job related work experiences. It is the author's opinion that a "common core" of experiences be generated from those questionnaire items that received average ratings below 1.5 and that these experiences be included within all wellness training programs. Further, it is recommended that a supplemental core of experiences be developed from the items that received ratings between 1.5 and 1.99.

Introduction

The concept of wellness as optional health and therefore, optional productivity is just beginning to be realized by corporate administrators. Corporations of all sizes are beginning to employ professionals to implement, direct, and evaluate wellness programs for their employees and universities have recently begun to establish training programs in response to this need. However, at the present time, a specific set of guidelines for training corporate wellness professionals does not exist even though, numerous training programs have been developed. But, how valid are these programs and upon what guiding principles were they founded? Were they hastily designed and implemented in an attempt to attract students or were they developed from an indepth understanding of training needs?

The following research was undertaken in an attempt to identify the necessary components of a strong corporate wellness training program and to establish a sound research base from which valid curricular decisions could be formulated concerning program design.

Procedure

A 52 item questionnaire developed by Dr. Carol Christensen at San Jose State University in California was mailed to 393 corporate wellness professionals throughout the United States. Wellness professionals were asked to respond to each of the 52 items by circling either 1, 2 or 3 in the appropriate column. A one rating indicated compentencies of prime importance, a two rating indicated compentencies of secondary importance and a rating of three indicated competencies of

least or no importance. Questionnaire items were subdivided into three main areas which included academic coursework/skills, administrative skills and experience/certification. The responses from all returned questionnaires were tallied and average item ratings for each of the 52 items were calculated. Refer to Figure 1 for a complete listing of questionnaire items.

Results

Two-hundred and forty-eight of the three-hundred and ninety-three questionnaires which were mailed to practicing corporate wellness professionals in the field were analyzed which represented a return rate of 63.1%. Eight questionnaires were received late and therefore, not included in the final analysis. Table 1 provides a profile of the respondents by company size and ranged from a low of 6.4% for professionals who worked for companies of less than fifty employees to a high of 67.3% for wellness professionals who represented companies with greater than five-hundred employees. Inspection of the data indicates that more than two-thirds of the wellness professionals who returned surveys worked for large corporations with more than five-hundred employees. Average item rankings are listed in Tables 2, 3 and 4. Reported within Table 2 are nineteen items (36.5%) which received average ratings less than 1.5 by the respondents. Items receiving low average ratings were perceived as being the most important and consisted of items from all three subdivisions (academic coursework/skills, administrative skills and experience/certification). The top five rankings in order or perceived importance were 1) principles of exercise and

conditioning, 2) exercise prescription and individual program planning, 3) CPR certification, 4) program planning and administration and, 5) exercise physiology. Table 3 includes questionnaire items which received average ratings between 1.5 and 1.99. Inspection of the data reveals that twenty-five or 48.1% of the total items surveyed received intermediate rankings in terms of perceived importance. Again, it should be noted that numerous items representative of all three questionnaire subdivisions can be found within Table 3. Lastly, Table 4 lists eight items (15.4%) that received average ratings greater than or equal to 2.0 or the poorest ratings.

Discussion

As a result of the data obtained from the questionnaire, it can be seen that developing curriculum and necessary competancies for future corporate wellness professionals is not an easy task. However, as a result of the questionnaire, valuable data has been gathered and new insight has been gained into the specifics of professional program development. It is recommended that questionnaire items that received average ratings below 1.5 should comprise the "common core" of studies for future corporate wellness professionals and that items receiving average ratings between 1.5 and 1.99 should serve as a supplemental core.

Viable professional preparation programs need to include academic training in scientific coursework areas, practical and administrative skills and a variety of job-related experiences.

Academic training should include scientific coursework in the areas of exercise physiology, exercise prescription, anatomy and physiology, basic nutrition and first aid. Prospective corporate wellness professionals should also gain practical skill competencies in exercise leadership, individual program planning, risk factor identification, health appraisal, behavioral modification, weight control, motivational techniques and public relations. Necessary administrative competencies should include skills in overall program planning and budgeting. Lastly, CPR certification, job-related experience and internships should all be included as part of a strong undergraduate training program.

Outside of the minimal common core areas, skills and experiences presented above, it is further recommended that strong professional preparation programs include supplemental competencies and experiences in the following areas: communication, management, counseling, report writing, marketing, psychology, injury care and prevention, facility planning, stress management, lab testing and interpretation, exercises for special populations and elementary word processing. Trained corporate wellness professionals should also be encouraged to participate in professional organizations and enroll in a masters degree program.

Conclusions

1. Over two-thirds of the corporate wellness professionals who returned questionnaires were employed by corporations with more than five-hundred employees. This figure indicates that a majority of the individuals who are employed as wellness professionals work for large corporations.

2. Strong professional preparation programs in the area of wellness should include specific coursework, administrative and behavioral skills, and a variety of job-related experiences.

3. It should be emphasized that the questionnaire was designed to elicit responses concerning baseline or minimum competencies deemed necessary to prepare entry-level corporate wellness professionals and that actual academic programs of study may vary e.g., it is assumed that an individual who is studying to be a corporate wellness director would receive different and probably more comprehensive training than a person who endeavors to be a general exercise leader.

Figure 1

COMPETENCIES FOR WELLNESS/FITNESS PROFESSIONALS

Please indicate the importance of the following competencies for wellness/fitness professionals. Circle the numbers that indicate your opinion:

1. indicates competencies of prime importance
2. indicates competencies of secondary importance
3. indicates competencies of least (or no) importance

ACADEMIC COURSE WORK AND SKILLS

1 2 3 A. Exercise prescription and individual program planning
1 2 3 B. Fitness activities for each aspect of fitness
1 2 3 C. Principles of exercise and conditioning
1 2 3 D. Fitness testing modalities and interpretation of results
1 2 3 Field testing
1 2 3 Lab testing and evaluation
1 2 3 ECG interpretation
1 2 3 Interpretation of results
1 2 3 E. Basic nutrition (supplements, diets)
1 2 3 F. Chemistry and biochemistry
1 2 3 G. Anatomy and Physiology
1 2 3 H. Kinesiology and Biomechanics
1 2 3 I. Exercise Physiology
1 2 3 J. Leading physical activities
1 2 3 K. Health appraisal
1 2 3 L. Risk factor identification
1 2 3 M. Prevention and care of injuries
1 2 3 N. Stress management and relaxation
1 2 3 O. Weight control
1 2 3 P. Substance abuse
Q. Exercise for special populations
1 2 3 pregnant women
1 2 3 orthopedic problems
1 2 3 aged persons (those over 50)
1 2 3 young persons (those under 15)
1 2 3 diabetics
1 2 3 morbidly obese
R. Humanistic skills
1 2 3 psychology (social, behavioral, and sport)
1 2 3 behavior modification
1 2 3 motivational techniques
1 2 3 counseling
1 2 3 S. Speech
T. Business skills
1 2 3 accounting
1 2 3 business communication
1 2 3 management
1 2 3 marketing
1 2 3 public relations
U. Computer skills
1 2 3 computer use (data entry)
1 2 3 computer programming

ADMINISTRATION SKILLS

1 2 3 A. Program planning and administration
1 2 3 B. Budgeting
1 2 3 C. Facility planning
1 2 3 D. Equipment use and purchasing
1 2 3 E. Report writing

EXPERIENCE AND CERTIFICATIONS

1 2 3 A. Internships
1 2 3 B. Job experience
1 2 3 C. Basic first aid
1 2 3 D. CPR certification
E. College degree
1 2 3 B.A.
1 2 3 M.A. or M.S.
1 2 3 Ph.D.
1 2 3 F. Participation in professional organizations
1 2 3 G. Other certifications: ACSM Fitness Director or Exercise Specialist
1 2 3 AFB certification

PLEASE CHECK

1. The number of employees
___1-50 ___51-200 ___201-500 ___over 500

Survey Developed by: Carol L. Christensen, Dept. of Human Performance, San Jose State University

TABLE 1

No. of Employees	N_a	Percentage
1-50	16	6.4%
51-200	27	10.9%
201-500	38	15.3%
500+	167	67.3%

N_a = the number of respondents

TABLE 2

Items Receiving Average Ratings Less Than 1.5

(Most Important Items)

Survey Items	Avg. Item Rating
Principles of Exercise & Conditioning	1.156
Exercise Prescription & Individual Program Planning	1.172
CPR Certification	1.184
Program Planning & Administration	1.196
Exercise Physiology	1.198
Motivational Techniques	1.208
Risk Factor Identification	1.276
B.A. Degree	1.286
Job Experience	1.319
Anatomy & Physiology	1.348
Basic First Aid	1.373
Internships	1.381
Basic Nutrition	1.407
Fitness Activities for Each Aspect of Fitness	1.414
Health Appraisal	1.459
Public Relations	1.473
Budgeting	1.478
Behavior Modification	1.488
Weight Control	1.488

19/52 = 36.5%

TABLE 3

Items Receiving Average Ratings Between 1.5 and 1.99
(Intermediate Important Items)

Survey Items	Avg. Item Rating
Speech	1.512
Equipment Use & Purchasing	1.514
Management	1.520
Counseling	1.535
Leading Physical Activities	1.537
Report Writing	1.563
M.A. or M.S. Degree	1.573
Kinesiology and Biomechanics	1.581
Interpretation of Results (Fitness Testing)	1.604
Marketing	1.607
Psychology (Social, Behavior & Sport)	1.610
Participation in Professional Organizations	1.614
Prevention & Care of Injuries	1.619
Facility Planning	1.648
Stress Management & Relaxation	1.660
Aged Persons (Over 50) - Exer. for Special Pops.	1.692
Business Communication	1.708
Field Testing	1.710
Lab Tesing & Evaluation	1.821
Orthopedic Problems - Exer. for Special Pops.	1.828
Pregnant Women - Exer. for Special Pops.	1.898
Morbidly Obese - Exer. for Special Pops.	1.909
ACSM Fitness Instructor or Exercise Specialist	1.909
Computer Use (Data Entry)	1.933
Diabetics - Exer. for Special Pops.	1.950

25/52 = 48.1%

TABLE 4

Items Receiving Average Ratings Greater Than 1.99

(Least Important Items)

Survey Items	Avg. Item Rating
Substance Abuse	2.073
*AFB Certification	2.075
ECG Interpretation	2.084
Young Persons (Those Under 15)	2.192
Accounting	2.244
Chemistry & Biochemistry	2.284
Computer Programming	2.372
Ph.D.	2.533

8/52 = 15.4%

*AFB Certification does not exist at the present time.